

Story 2012 (1997 Dictated)

Narrator: Fethi Piringcioğlu

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A Laz¹ View of Language Skills

One day Temel² and Captain Recep were seated near the street and chatting. After they had been talking for awhile, an automobile came down the street and stopped alongside them. A man stepped out of the automobile and asked in French, "In what direction do we go to reach the city of Rize?" Temel and Recep looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders.

The stranger then spoke to them in English: "Which road should we take to go to Rize?" Recep looked at Temel, and Temel looked at Recep, but both of them

¹The word Laz referred originally to an ethnic minority living primarily in Trabzon and Rize provinces, along the extreme eastern part of the Turkish Black Sea coast. More recently the word has come to be applied to any resident of the entire Turkish Black Sea coast. In the Turkish oral tradition, Laz people are stereotyped as being stupid or inept. This stereotype (like most others) is unjustifiable, for Lazes are, of course, like other people

²In tales about the stereotyped Laz as fool, the male characters usually have one or another of five or six very common Laz names. Temel is the name used most often, with Dursun in second place. Thus if either name occurs in a tale, the audience knows at once that it is a Laz story,

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remained silent.

The stranger then called his wife and said to her, "Ask them in Spanish for advice about going to Rize."

The woman said to them in somewhat broken Spanish, "We want to go to Rize. Can you tell us how to reach that city?" One of the Lazes coughed and the other cleared his throat, but neither said a word

The husband then said to his wife, "Many Turks have gone to Germany to find work. Some of them must have learned some German. Ask them in German for the information that we need."

The woman asked them loudly in German, "How can we reach Rize? Which road should we take?"

Recep was frozen in silence, and Temel looked at the woman helplessly. Her husband became angry and said, "You want more tourists to come here and visit your country, but you do not know even one language to communicate with them!" Of course the two Lazes did not understand that either, and so the man turned to his wife and said, "Let us continue traveling somewhere before darkness arrives."

After they had gone, Recep said to Temel, "It is really a shame that neither of us could understand anything that those visitors said! They spoke to us in four

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different languages, but we did not know even one of those languages! We should go--no later than tomorrow!--to a school and learn a foreign language. Shouldn't we do that? What do you say?"

Without thinking about that suggestion for even a moment, Temal said, "No! Those people spoke four different languages but still could not explain what they wanted. What good would it do us to learn one foreign language?"